

The Christian Religion Increas'd by Miracle.

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MEMORANDUM

TO THE HONORABLE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR

FROM THE COMMISSIONER OF THE GENERAL LAND OFFICE

SUBJECT: [Illegible]

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S E R M O N
O N

I S A I A H IX. 22.

A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong Nation: I the Lord will hasten it in His time.

THE Evangelic Prophet is very particular, throughout This Chapter, in describing the sudden and mighty increase of Christianity, its triumphant progress thro' all Nations, and its prevalence over all other Religions in the World. And this Wondrous Enlargement of it, he takes occasion (at the Close of the Chapter) Particularly to magnifie from the consideration of that Small Appearance it should make at first, and those Slender and Unpromising Beginnings, with which it should set out. *A little one*, says he in That Verse I have read to you, *shall be-*

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come

come a thousand, and a small one a strong Nation ; I the Lord will hasten it in *His* (i.e. in the Messiah's) time. From which words therefore I shall take occasion to raise These several Heads of Discourse.

First, I shall enquire into the Matter of Fact itself to which This Prophecie refers; how swift and strange the *increase of the Gospel* really was, at, and after its first setting out from *Jerusalem*.

Secondly, I shall prove to you, that This *Increase* was certainly *Miraculous*, and owing chiefly to the mighty Operations, and effectual Assistances of the Holy Spirit of God. After establishing which great Truth upon firm and proper Arguments, I shall, in the

Third place, fairly lay together what can be offered to evade the force of them, and give the several Objections their Answers.

Fourthly, I shall consider how great an Advantage it brings to the Christian Religion, to have had such a *miraculous increase* of its Professors, and what excellent Uses and Purposes it serves.

Fifthly and Lastly, I shall enquire into the *Time when*, and the *Manner how*, this Miracle ceas'd; and make some suitable Reflections upon it, with regard, both to *Those* who liv'd *Then*, When this stop was put to the *Gospel*, and to *Us*, who live *Now* in the Latter Ages of the World.

I. I am to Enquire into the Matter of Fact itself, to which the Prophecie of the Text refers; and to consider

sider, how swift and strange the Increase of the Gospel was, at, and after its first setting out from *Jerusalem*. And the Account of this is as much above Imagination, as it is beyond Dispute.

From *S. Luke* we learn, that, upon the Ascent of *Our Saviour*, the *little Flock* He had gathered consisted of but one hundred and twenty Disciples; These receiv'd a mighty addition to their number on the very day of Pentecost, the day on which the Apostles enter'd on the Public Exercise of Their Ministry; even on That day Three Thousand Souls were brought over to the Faith, by a Sermon of *S. Peters*: so well did that Spiritual Fisher begin to make good the Character, which Christ had given of him, that *he should catch men*. After this, *the number of the Disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly*, says the same holy Pen: (greatly even in proportion to their first increase) Indeed so much, and so fast, that even the *Acts of the Apostles* (which being written by *S. Luke*, the Companion of *S. Paul*, are spent chiefly in giving an account of That Particular Apostles Labours and Travels, and of Those of them only which he underwent in some Few First years of his Ministry) I say (the Acts of the Apostles) do (however) contain an account of the spreading of the Gospel Forward thrô many Eastern Countries, and Backwards thrô a great part of the West: of its piercing on the one side into all the Civiliz'd, and some of the Barbarous Provinces of *Asia*, and on the other, as

far as the great Metropolis of *Europe*, *Rome* itself; so mightily grew the word of God, and prevail'd!

Indeed, The Writers of the Story of the Church do with one consent agree, that *Scythia*, *India*, *Gaul*, and *Egypt*, all the most distant parts of the World Then known, had the Doctrine of Christ conveyed to them in less than forty years, *i. e.* before the destruction of the *Jewish* State by *Titus*.

And what Degree of success the Voice of These Preachers had in the several Countries, thro' which it sounded, we may learn from the Antient Apologists, who, e're Two Centuries were run out, pleaded for Christianity, on the account of its vast and incredible numbers; represented to the Heathen Emperors, that their Courts, their Camps, their Cities, their Provinces, were all full of them: and that it was impossible to extirpate them without destroying the far Greatest part of their Subjects.

Thus did the Christian Faith diffuse itself, like Lightning, from East to West, with an unconceivable swiftness; gaining, as it went along, mighty spoils from all Religions, and gathering vast multitudes of every Country under its Banners. And therefore well did the Founder of this Kingdom Thus Prophecie concerning it. *Unto what is the Kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a Grain of Mustard-seed, which a man took and threw into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great Tree: and the Fowls of the Air lodged*

lodged in the branches of it. And, again he said, *Whereunto shall I liken the Kingdom of God? It is like Leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, until the Whole was leavened.*

But because the matter of Fact it self, that there was such a sudden and prodigious increafe of Converts to Christianity, is so well agreed upon on all hands, as to need no set Proof; it may suffice to have given this short Account of it.

I go on now, in the *Second* place, to prove, that this *increafe* was certainly *miraculous*, and owing chiefly to the mighty Operations, and effectual Assistances of the Holy Spirit of God; and that for This plain Reason: because the Natural and Visible Causes which concurr'd to the Production of This great Effect, were not at all equal to the Effect produc'd; and therefore there must needs have been some Supernatural and Invisible Cause at the bottom of it.

The Appearing Causes and Instruments of this Wondrous Revolution were chiefly Twelve Men, of obscure Birth and Parentage, of the meanest Education, of the plainest and simplest Understandings, unpolish'd by Learning and Eloquence, unimprov'd by Experience and Converse; Men of no Subtily, no Art, no Address; that had no manner of Authority, Interest, or Repute in the World. These Men undertake to convince the World, that one *Jesus*, a Man who had been seen just before to expire.

expire publicly on the Cross, was the true God, blessed forever ; and, in consequence of this, to preach up a Doctrine the most unwelcome to Flesh and Blood that could be, the most repugnant to Men's natural Desires and Inclinations, to their settled Habits, and inveterate Prejudices ; contrary to the Establish'd Rites and Religions of all Countrys, and in all Ages of the World. They set out from *Jerusalem* with This Design, they disperse themselves through all the quarters of the Earth, they succeed every where, and in a very short time prevail with great Multitudes in every Nation and Kingdom to submit to the Laws, and to own the Religion of Jesus.

Now, I say, here was no manner of proportion between the Cause and its Effect, between the Work that was wrought, and the Instruments that wrought it : and therefore it must needs have been, that a Divine Invisible Power went along with 'em in every step, and *miraculously* bless'd their Endeavors. Which Truth, that we may be fully convinc'd of, I shall consider more particularly, What (naturally speaking) are the best Advantages for a New Opinion to set up with, and under what Circumstances it is most likely to prevail ; and I shall shew, that the Christian Religion was utterly destitute of Every One of these Advantages, and yet nevertheless *did* prevail.

Now there are *Four* Things that chiefly conduce to the spreading of any New Doctrine, and do most remarkably

remarkably make way for its reception in the World.

As, *First*, If the Principles of it be suited to the Lusts, the Interests, and Wishes of Those among whom it is to be propagated.

Secondly, If it be supported and countenanced by Men of Power and Authority, of great Name and Note; if it be either forcibly obtruded upon men by those who have Dominion over 'em, or more indirectly advanc'd by Art and Management, and the Methods of worldly Prudence.

Thirdly, If it be first brought into the World in dark and barbarous Ages, when Men are either too Rude and Illiterate to be Able to weigh And to dispute the Truth of it, or too much sunk in Sloth and Vice, to be Willing to do it. Or,

Fourthly, If it be not proposed to men, all At Once, but be insinuated into 'em by Degrees, Secretly and Insensibly.

As to the *First* of these, it is certain, that nothing recommends a new Doctrine so much, or bids so fair for its Universal Reception, as its falling in with the corrupt Desires and Inclinations, the Passions and Prejudices of Men. For Men are, without difficulty, brought to believe an Opinion true, which they wish true beforehand. And This was the way in which that cunning Impostor *Mahomet* set up for a new Prophet. He made his Doctrine as relishing and palatable as he could; contriv'd it on purpose, so, as it might gratify

tifie Men's Lusts and Appetites, and especially that it might comply with the loose and wanton Manners of the *East*; where he first erected his Standard. And Thus also, ever since, has Libertinism of all kinds promoted its Interest, and increased its Party. Heterodox Opinions have grown up and thriven, in prejudice to true Religion, and sound Morality, because there was Something in 'em that flattered either our Vanity, our Lust, or our Pride, and fell in with a darling Inclination. And This was that single Art, to which Mr. *Hobbs* ow'd all his Reputation and his Followers; it was not his Philosophy, and his boasted Reason that drew Men in, but the skill he had in fitting his Principles to Men's Constitutions and Tempers: He knew what would take and be lik'd, and he express'd it after a taking manner; and no wonder then if it were greedily entertain'd. To talk *against* receiv'd Opinions, and *in behalf* of some belov'd Vices and Frailties; to dress up his Discourse in all the natural Beauties of Language, and to give it beside the air of Demonstration; This he knew to be a sure way of making the Men of Wit and Pleasure of his side; and This therefore he followed with application and success, like one of the *Children of This Generation*, thar are *wiser in Their way, than the Children of Light*.

But now, when Christianity first appear'd, did it take This way of spreading its interests? No! but, quite contrary, it propos'd naked and simple Truths, without

without any regard to what was Agreeable and Pleasing. It held forth High and Unconceivable mysteries, which the Pride of Man would make him apt to Suspect, because he could not Comprehend ; and it preach'd up Harsh and Ungrateful Doctrines, which did Violence to Mens Natures, and which it was Death to them to think of entertaining. And yet, I say, under This great Disadvantage it made its way, and prosper'd. But

Secondly, It is another great Advantage to a rising Opinion, if it be espous'd by Men of Authority, Reputation, and Parts ; that may either force its reception by Dint of Power, or bring it about by Arts of Management and Contrivance. And Thus the Prophet of the East also hew'd out his way by the power of the Sword ; took advantage from the divisions and weakness of Christendom, to arm a Savage Multitude, and make large inroads into it ; and then, having brought into subjection the *Bodies* of Men first, had no hard task afterwards to inflave their *Souls*.

And Thus was it, that the Papal Usurpations often prevail'd ; the Bishops of *Rome* got Zealous Princes into their Interests, and made them blindly obedient to the Holy See, and then, by Their help, forc'd their Decrees upon whole unwilling Provinces and Kingdoms. And as Some of their Encroachments Thus got footing, so many Others, we know, were brought in at first, and have been supported ever since, by the

highest and most refine Arts of Policy. That See has never wanted, from the very moment that it first set up its pretences, a number of skilful Managers, that have continually pleaded its Cause, and carried on its Interests, with all the Dexterity and Address that Human Wit is capable of: It has ever had the warmest (I had almost said the wisest) heads, and most willing hands, ready to engage in its Service: and no wonder therefore if its Delusions have spread so far and wide, and infected such Numbers.

It was much the Same Case with the Broachers of Heresie in the Antient Church; They were generally Leading Men, of some Figure and Repute in the World, of great Wit and Subtlety: and by the help of These they were able to raise a Dust, and to make a Noise, and to create a Party to themselves.

But now, when Christianity set out, how weak and defenceless was it, how Artless and undesigning! How utterly unsupported either by the Secular Arm, or Secular Wisdom! *I send you*, said our Saviour to his Apostles, *like Sheep among Wolves*: And accordingly they went forth in the Spirit of Simplicity, of Humility, and Meekness: Arm'd only with Truth, and Innocence; a good Cause, and an equal Resolution: *The Weapons of their Warfare were not Carnal, but Spiritual.*

The Messengers of these Glad Tydings were so far from having a Name in the World, that They were
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Contemtable : Were scorn'd, as *Jews*, by the Rest of Mankind ; and as the meanest and lowest of *Jews*, by the *Jews* themselves. They left their Nets, and their Hooks (which probably were the Onely things they understood) to come into a New World, which they knew nothing of, and to Preach a New Gospel, with which all Men were unacquainted : and yet still, I say, under These disadvantages also, the *Word of God* mightily grew and prevail'd.

A *Third* Help towards planting a Doctrine it has been said to be, if it be brought into the World in Dark and Barbarous Times ; when Men are either too Rude and Illiterate, to be Able to weigh, and to dispute the Truth of it ; or too much sunk in Sloth and Vice, to be Willing to do it. And This again cannot but put us in mind of the *Romish* Superstitions. For it is plain, that They took That Time of settling and spreading their Empire that, of all Times, since the coming of Christ, was the most Ignorant, and the least Inquisitive ; when Men were Vicious, Lazy, Dispirited, Fearful, and Credulous ; when gross Darknes sat upon the Face of the West ; when the Irruptions of the *Goths* and *Vandals* had destroy'd all the Old Learning, as well as the Old Buildings, and left nothing but Ignorance and Barbarity behind them : Then, in that *Night*, as the Parable speaks, did the Cunning *Enemy* come, and sow his *Tares*, when there was no body at Work, or Awake to observe him. And, when he had sown

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them, how could it otherwise be, but that they should grow up together with the Corn, and Flourish? But did the Gospel take these advantages of Mens Credulity and Supineness? No, it took all ways of being Try'd and Examin'd to the uttermost. It alarm'd the World a good while Before hand, and gave fair Warning of its approach by plain Signs, and Predictions: and if the Prophecies of the Old Testament will not be admitted as Proofs in this case, sure *Tacitus*, and *Vergil* may be heard; the First of which lays it down, as a known Truth, that there was (about the Time of our Saviour) a strong Tradition, thro' all the *East*, of a certain mighty Prince that was Then and There expected to arise, and to govern the World; and the Latter, out of the *Sibylline* Verses, transcrib'd Such an Account of things, as did evidently, and could only belong to the Days of the Gospel, and the Reign of the Messiah.

But That, which is most Remarkable on This Head, is, that God pitch'd upon That particular Age, to manifest his Gospel in, when Good Sense, and Learning, and Wit were at the highest; When the *Roman* Empire was in its full Glory, and together with it all the Arts and Sciences flourish'd: When the World was in profound Peace, and at Liberty to examine the Truth of an Opinion, that set up with Such pretences. Then did the Glorious Light of the Gospel shine forth, and challenge all the Curiosity, the Subtilty, and Spite of Men.

Men to inquire into it, and sift it. The Doctrines of Christianity shew'd themselves bare fac'd to all the Wits and Sages, of both *Rome* and *Athens*; and defy'd their Doubts and their Reasonings. And yet, under These discouraging Circumstances also, it took root downwards, and brought forth fruit upwards, speedily, and abundantly.

The *fourth* Help towards establishing any New Doctrine is, if it be not propos'd to Men All at Once, but insinuated into them only by insensible Steps and Degrees: and This method has often made room for the belief of the most Monstrous Doctrines, and the entertainment of the Wildest Absurdities. Witness [once more] several Articles in the *Roman Catholic* Faith; which, had they been offer'd to the minds of Men at once, in their full Latitude, had been refus'd with indignation and horror; but being propos'd by piecemeal as it were, were admitted, before Men were aware; every first step into Error smoothing the way towards a second; and so onward, till the passage was widen'd enough for a good lusty Contradiction to enter in at it. But far from this Artificial Method of winning belief was the Religion of *Jesus*. At its first coming abroad it offer'd itself to the View of Men, at full Length, and in all its proportions. No Moral Precept was reserv'd for a more Convenient Time, no Doctrine (no Great Fundamental Doctrine) was disguis'd, or conceal'd. The Message it brought, it deliver'd

deliver'd, plainly and openly, at once ; the most unwelcome Practical Truths, a long with Those already Receiv'd ; the Sublimest Points of Faith, together with the most Easie and Allow'd Ones.

The Primitive Apostles, did not, like those Later ones, the Fathers of the Mission of *China*, Preach up first a *Glorify'd*, and then a *Crucify'd* Saviour ; but bore the Scandal of the Cross, wheresoever, and to whomsoever they open'd the Doctrines of it : The slaying of *Jesus*, and his being hanged on a Tree is mention'd in the very first Sermons of *S. Peter*. This (humanely speaking) was an Unlikely way of gaining Profelytes ; and yet, in spite of This Unlikelihood Thus were innumerable Profelytes gain'd.

Let us lay together what has been said. The Gospel of Christ, at its Earliest appearance, had all the Probabilities in the World *against* its Success : for it was possesst scarce of any One of those advantages, which do most signally recommend a new Doctrine, and make it thrive. It had no Complying Tenets, to sooth Mens Appetites and Passions ; but was all Harsh and Austere. It had no encouragement, no protection from the Civil Power ; no Force nor Cunning to uphold it ; no Men of Eminence and Esteem to engage on its side. The Age, in which it chose to discover it self, was the most discerning and enlightned, the most curious and inquisitive of [perhaps] any that ever was before it, or has been since it : and therefore it did not impose

impose at unawares upon a rude and ignorant Generation. Finally its Promulgers deliver'd it not out by Parcels, as is the way of Cunning and Designing Men ; but offer'd the Whole of it to be all together examin'd, and compar'd. And yet, with All These Clogs and Incumbrances upon it, it sprang forth, and made its way into the World, by a swift and incredible Progress.

And from hence therefore I inferr, that a Divine Power and Vertue must needs have gone along with it, to Supply what was Wanting to it upon Other accounts ; and that its *Increase* cannot be esteem'd of any otherwise, than as *Supernatural* and *Miraculous* : So that, were we acquainted with nothing more concerning the Apostles, but what we have in the Four Evangelists ; were the Book of their *Acts* lost, and, together with it, all manner of account of the wondrous Effusion of the Holy Spirit upon them, at the day of Pentecost ; and of the mighty Signs and Wonders which they afterwards perform'd in Vertue of that Unction : I say, were we in the Dark to all these Matters of Fact, which plainly shew the Christian Religion to have been propagated by Miracle ; yet could no Considering Man however deny but that their must have been somewhat Miraculous in it. Such an Increase from Such beginnings ; Such a wonderful Revolution brought about by Such weak and disproportion'd Instruments, is itself a Miracle, and the greatest

est of Miracles : and does as Evidently assure us, that the Preaching of the Apostles was in the *Demonstration of the Spirit and of Power*, as if we had heard them speaking with Strange Tongues, seen them Healing the Blind and Lame, and Reviving the Dead.

Which Truth that we may be yet *Further* confirm'd in, let us consider (as I propos'd) in the *Third Place*, what *Shifts* the Enemies of the Gospel make use of to evade the force of This Argument. This then is the utmost that Any of them pretend to say. 'Tis true, they will own, Christianity multiply'd very fast, and This Increase of it was, in *some* sense, *Miraculous* : That is, it was *wonderful* ; as every Unusual Thing is to those who do not know, or consider the Causes of it. But to a man, they say, that will dare to go out of the Common road, and to think for himself, it will appear, that there were at That Time natural Causes a foot, sufficient to produce this Effect, without needing a Recourse to something Divine and Supernatural. The Apostles indeed were Twelve plain Illiterate Men, that had not in Themselves force or skill enough, to bring about Such an Event : but Their Natural Inability was supply'd by a Lucky Confluence of Other Causes, and by several Accidental Advantages, that mightily help'd on the Work. As for Example,

The *Sufferings* of those poor bigotted Creatures, the *Martyrs*, made mighty impressions upon Men, especially upon Those of the same Rank with the
Sufferers

Sufferers, the Common people ; who never fail to take the side of the Oppress'd ; and to think that Cause *good* (let it be what it will) for the Profession of which Men are *us'd* ill. Then, the Purity of the Christian Moral^s was a mighty Argument to bring in the Men of Probity and Vertue into the Interests of the Gospel. And so Also, was the Analogy of some of its Mystical Truths, to the Doctrines of *Plato*, then in great esteem and vogue, a very good Bait to the Men of Philosophy and Learning. The Distribution of Goods, which the first Christians made, and their Living together in Common, was a good Reason for many mens embracing That Truth, which they were sure would maintain them. The Casual Cessation of Oracles was immediately turn'd to the advantage of the Christian Religiou, as if *That* had procur'd it. And the destruction of the *Jewish* State, contributed greatly to the encrease of the Christian Numbers ; because it seem'd to have been *foretold* by Christ ; and therefore *luckily* coming to pass about that time, rais'd an high Opinion in Men of his Person, and Doctrine ; and made them willing to think, that the Christian Establishment, now newly set up, was design'd by God to come into the Room of the *Jewish* one, which then hapned to be pull'd down.

And thus, say they, several Extraordinary and Accidental Advantages conspiring to advance the Growth of Christianity, it grew indeed mightily, and

prevail'd : as a little River will swell high, and spread itself wide, and run far, if a great many other Streams should at once happen to empty themselves into it. and These *second Causes*, they think had of themselves force enough, without our having recourse to a *first*, to solve the appearance.

But now, in opposition to this, that These Causes assign'd were utterly insufficient to produce the Event, for which they are assign'd, a short Review of them, I think (and the time will allow of but a short one) will easily satisfy us.

The *Blood of the Martyrs* was indeed, according to that well known saying, the *Seed of the Church*. But how? Not surely by alluring Men to the Profession of Christianity, at the Time *when* those Martyrs suffer'd; for certainly nothing was more apt to frighten and discourage men from professing the Gospel, then to find they should be persecuted for it. But the meaning of that saying is, that the Sufferings and Torments, which the first Christians underwent, so willingly and so bravely, were a strong Evidence of the Truth of that Doctrine, which could inspire its followers with so much Courage, Constancy, and Resolution; and dispos'd men mightily to embrace the Religion of Christ *afterwards*, in better and more quiet Times.

But before This Motive could have any great force and influence, the Gospel had *already* spread and settled.

settled itself every where : and therefore nothing can well be accounted for, on This Head, but the Accession that was made to Christianity, *after* it was sufficiently establish'd; and This had confessedly nothing extraordinary in it, and is not the Thing which we are at present Enquiring after.

The same Answer serves to that Other pretended account of this Increase, from the *Destruction of the Jewish State*. It did indeed add to the Numbers of Christian Converts, *when* it hapned; but it hapned not till near forty Years after the Death of Christ; and by That time Christianity was strong enough of itself, and needed no Aids. And then, even at *that* time, tho' Several *Jews* promoted the Interests of the Gospel, by owning the Faith, yet the Obstinate Part of them, that stood out, did it abundantly more harm, then the Complying Ones did it good. For They were not satisfy'd in rejecting Christianity themselves, but made it their business to render it odious, suspected, and contemptible to the Heathens also, in all the Corners of the *Earth*, to which they were driven.

The *Purity of the Christian Morals*, and the answerable Lives of Christian Converts, was indeed what would be apt to make men admire and value the Doctrine of Christ, but by no means to come under the Yoke of it : For tho' most Men have an Esteem for strict Rules, and strict Livers; yet few care to pra-

etise the one, or to Imitate the other. And nothing, I think, could be contriv'd so effectual (next to the former wise Motive from the Sufferings of the Martyrs) to *deter* men from Christianity; as to tell them, that when they took it upon them, they must renounce their dearest Appetites, and Passions, and deny their very Selves. And I desire the Men, who raise these Objections against the Divinity of the Gospel, to tell us fairly, whether if They had liv'd at that time, they think They should have come in upon This Principle: I am sure, they would not; because it is This Principle alone, that they must part with their Satisfactions and Pleasures if they do, that keeps them out of it now. Therefore neither can This be any Sufficient reason for the sudden and wide Growth of Christianity.

The *Analogy of some mystical Truths of Christianity to the Doctrine of Plato*, is a yet a weaker plea. For This Motive is Calculated to touch but very few onely, the Philosophers of the *Academic School*. And with Those it could have no Great weight surely: or, at least, not enough, to over ballance that Scorn and Contempt which upon other accounts they had of the Christian Religion and its Promulgers; of That, for its short Unphilosophical way of proposing its Truths, without Demonstration and Reasoning; and of Those, for their Ignorance, and the Meannells of their Education. And accordingly we find the Event was: For we have no absolute certainty that any One Philosopher of

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Note embrac'd the Christian Faith, till it had been for many Years Preach'd and disseminated, and had taken deep root in the World.

The *Casual Cessation of Oracles* (as 'tis call'd) about the Time of Promulging the Gospel was *not casual*, but directly caus'd by that Promulgation; and we own, had men understood it to be so, *then*, and imputed this Cessation to its True Principle, it would have been very Effectual to have brought in the Heathen World to the acknowledgment of Christ. But we deny, that they did at all understand, or allow it to be so. And for a plain Proof of this, we refer our selves to That discourse in *Plutarch*, about the Cessation of Oracles; where, among many Reasons which that Learned Man assigns for it, This of the coming of Christ is not mention'd, or hinted at: Tho' He gives Such an account of things there, that a *Christian* would easily prove, from what *He* relates, that it was really the coming of Christ that effected it.

Lastly, Neither can any probable account of this matter be drawn from the *Charitable Distribution of their Goods which the first Christians made*. For, supposing This might tempt some of the Poorer sort; yet surely They that were Easie in their Circumstances, and had wherewithall to sustain themselves, did not come in upon This Motive. It will not be said, I hope, that They who *made* this Distribution of their Goods (which will be found have been a very great and

and considerable number) came in to *partake* of it. But then neither could the Hopes of this be any Great Temptation even to the Poorer sort; since there was Something in the Christian Religion ten times more apt to frighten them, than This was to allure them; the strict Rules of Honesty and Temperance they were bound to live by, and the great Calamities and Persecutions they were sure to undergoe.

I do not deny (after all) but that Every One of These Causes, might (in a *natural* way) contribute *somewhat*, either to the planting, or spreading of the Gospel. But I think it is Evident, from the short *Hints* I have suggested to You, that All of them together, were not able to do the thousandth part of That Work, which is allotted them. And therefore to resolve this Great Event into a mere *Conspiracy* of *second Causes*, as 'tis call'd, without any regard to the *first*, is an absurd and a senseless attempt; and onely shews us, how very strong an *Inclination* and *Bias*s there must be in Some minds towards Infidelity, when they can bring themselves to espouse it, upon so very Slight Grounds.

A man that should see an Acorn put into the Ground, and perceive in a Few weeks or months an Oak shoot up from it, to a prodigious height, and spread its Branches to an amazing extent so as even to cover the whole Field where it grew; might as well say, there was a strange *Conspiracy* of *Natural Causes*, an extraordinary degree of warmth, moisture,

moyfture, and fo forth, which concurr'd to produce this effect; as affirm, that the Vast Progress of the Gospel was owing to fuch *petty Principles*, as Some men endeavour to perfuade themfelves it was.

But it muft be granted them, that their Thoughts are of a *piece*, and that This particular Tenet falls in with Their Syfteme. For their account of the *New Creation* by Jesus Chrift, is much like That they give of the *Old one*. It was a Lucky Hit of concurring Causes that propagated Chriftianity. And it was a Lucky Hit alfo, in the feveral motions of innumerable Atoms that at firft made the World. And 'tis the fame Lucky Hit that ftill preferves and governs it too. And They who assert the Laft of thefe Opinions, may, confiftently enough, be fupposed to entertain the former too. But furely no other Creature but an *Atheift by Complexion* can ever take up with fuch *pittiful* Account of things.

Well then, The Chriftian Religion, from fmall and weak beginnings, fpread itfelf farr and wide, after a fudden and ftrange manner; and this it did, againft all probability, and contrary to all the Rules of fuccefs, that all other Riling Opinions have ever fet up with: It had no One of thofe great Advantages, fome of which recommend every new Sect that ftands and prevails: and as for all other Leffer Helps and Affiftances toward its increafe which the Wit of Man can affign, they are apparently too weak

weak to sustain the weight that is lay'd on them. It remains therefore, that This wondrous Effect sprang undoubtedly from the immediate Influence of the First Cause, actuating after an Extraordinary manner the Industry, and blessing the Endeavours of the Apostles; stirring up the Minds of Men to attend to, and disposing Their Hearts to imbrace the Truths of the Gospel; in a word, accompanying all they said and did, with mighty Signs, and Wonders; with the *Demonstration of the Spirit and of Power!*

F I N I S.

Advertisement.

PRinted for *Tho. Bennet*: A Sermon on *Praise and Thanksgiving*, before the Queen, at *White-Hall* May 29. 1692. *The Power of Charity to cover sin*. A Sermon before the Governours of *Bridewell* and *Bethlehem*, August 16. 1694. Both by the same Author.

